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Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps, Program Director  
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Energy and Technology Committee

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Supporting S.B. 23, An Act Concerning Global Warming

Senator Fonfara, Representative Fontana, and members of the committee: Environment Connecticut offers this testimony supporting S.B. 23. Legislation to address the urgent need to cut Connecticut's emissions of global warming pollution is the top legislative priority for Environment Connecticut in 2008.

Environment Connecticut is a statewide member-supported nonprofit, nonpartisan environmental advocacy organization. Our staff combines independent research, practical solutions, and advocacy to win positive results for our environment. We draw on 35 years of experience working for environmental policy solutions in Connecticut and Washington D.C.

**S.B. 23**

Global Warming is one of the most profound threats of our time. To prevent the most dangerous impacts of global warming, our state and nation must halt increases in global warming pollution now, cut emissions by at least 15 percent by 2020, and put ourselves on the path to an 80% cut by 2050.

These are ambitious goals and meeting them won't be easy. However, they are the minimum necessary response to the threat posed by global warming. Protecting our environment, our economy, and future generations requires bold action.

The policies in S.B. 23 can help Connecticut achieve progress towards achieving these necessary emissions cuts.

Ensuring that state agencies implement policies to reduce emissions associated with their operations, in accordance with the state Climate Change Action Plan, is a common-sense step ensuring that state government leads by example in this effort. (Section 1)

Increased incentives for installation of distributed residential clean, renewable solar electric generation in Connecticut is also a very important step. Such programs are vital to laying the groundwork for a transition towards large-scale adoption of clean, renewable electric generation to meet Connecticut's future electric needs. We note that the language in the bill needs clarification to ensure that it is additive to the existing residential solar rebate program administered by the Clean Energy Fund. (Section 4)

The "green collar jobs" provision of the bill is also a useful step. Transitioning to a future of reduced emissions of global warming pollution will require a workforce trained with the skills for jobs in clean energy industries. Provisions such as this are a step towards ensuring

that Connecticut's workforce is ahead of the curve and that our state is ready to take advantage of the economic opportunities created by the transition to a cleaner, low-carbon economic structure nationwide. (Section 6)

As the committee knows, Connecticut has taken important first steps towards cutting its global warming pollution. We are in the process of implementing the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative to cut emissions from power plants. The state is currently working with other states nationwide to fight for implementation of the Clean Car tailpipe emissions standards adopted by the General Assembly in 2004. And the state's Climate Change Action Plan established first steps towards achieving global warming pollution reductions. S.B. 23 is a positive contribution to these efforts.

### **Next Steps**

Along with the policies in S.B. 23, the General Assembly should take the next major step towards ensuring that Connecticut achieves actual reductions in its global warming emissions consistent with the goals set in statute and outlined in the state Climate Change Action Plan. Specifically, the state should adopt a mandatory emissions cap to require emissions reductions statewide to 10% below 1990 levels by 2020 and put the state on the path to an 80% cut by 2050.

New Jersey, California, and Hawaii have already taken this step. Those states have enacted mandatory emissions caps for 2020 and beyond. Such caps provide the necessary framework to ensure that policies are implemented to achieve the emissions cuts from all sectors of the economy that are necessary for individual states, such as Connecticut, to do their part in achieving the reductions necessary to avoid the worst effects of global warming.

Similar legislation is currently being considered in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Wisconsin, Maryland, Illinois, Washington, and Oregon. States adopting such policies are setting the bar for federal action, and will have a better opportunity for a "seat at the table" as national global warming policy is debated in coming years. Our state agencies will be consulted. Our congressional delegation will have more say. And we can have more opportunity to ensure that federal policies are written in a way that makes sense for Connecticut, and that the actions we take now position our state to more effectively participate in a national program to cut global warming pollution.

### **Background**

The world is getting warmer and is sure to get warmer in the years to come. But how much warmer the world will get is largely within our control. If we continue burning more fossil fuels each year, the outlook for our environmental and economic future is bleak. But if we act quickly to reduce our emissions of global warming pollution, we can prevent the worst impacts of global warming. In the process, we can also create jobs, reduce costs to consumers and businesses, make our power system more reliable through diversification with clean, renewable energy sources, and improve the quality of life in our community by getting serious about responsible "smart growth" policies.

The key benchmark for our nation and the world is 450 parts per million (ppm). That is the maximum concentration of global warming pollutants (in carbon dioxide equivalent) in the

atmosphere that science indicates will give us a chance of preventing a global temperature rise of more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) from pre-industrial levels. Since the concentration of global warming pollutants is already 427 parts per million and rising, the need for action is immediate.

Temperature increase of 2 degrees Celsius is a rough threshold beyond which many of the most dangerous impacts of global warming may become inevitable. These include:

- High risk of extinction for 20 to 30 percent of species worldwide.
- Increased risk of coastal flooding from sea-level rise.
- Raised risk of severe weather events such as extreme precipitation events and prolonged drought.
- Dramatic increases in temperatures during summer months.

Here in Connecticut, the effects of global warming pose significant threats to our environment, economy, and public health. Just one example is the effects on precipitation patterns statewide.

In December, we released a report in conjunction with Environment America that analyzed the rise in extreme precipitation events due to climate change. The report, "When It Rains It Pours" found that between 1948 and 2006, the frequency of extreme precipitation events in Connecticut rose 44%. This climate change threatens to expose our state to increased damages from flooding associated with extreme precipitation events. It also threatens our water supply and agricultural economy because such events are likely to be punctuated by extended periods of drought.

Time is running out to prevent these impacts. Each year, we get closer to the 450 parts per million threshold. And because half of the carbon dioxide we emit today will stay in the atmosphere for a century or more, every year we wait to act makes the job of stopping dangerous global warming that much harder.

Climate scientist James Hansen of NASA, who first warned Congress of global warming in 1989, has argued that the earth's climate is nearing a "tipping point" that, if passed, would lead to "practically a different planet." In 2006, he wrote that, "We have at most ten years – not ten years to decide upon action, but ten years to alter fundamentally the trajectory of global greenhouse gas emissions."

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony on S.B. 23, An Act Concerning Global Warming. We urge support for this legislation as part of the efforts to achieve the global warming pollution reductions necessary for Connecticut to do its part in stopping global warming.

Sincerely,

Christopher Phelps  
Environment Connecticut

